

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-05

TRSE-00 MCT-01 ERDA-05 OES-07 IO-13 NSCE-00

SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 /081 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1903

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6281

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PDIP, SHUM, AR, US

SUBJECT: ASST SEC TODMAN'S MEETING WITH
PRESIDENT VIDELA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 6127

1. THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY CALLED ON
PRESIDENT VIDELA AT 1030 AM AUGUST 15.

2. PRESIDENT VIDELA EXPRESSED HIS WARM
WELCOME TO ASSTSEC TODMAN AND ASKED IF HE
HAD BEEN ABLE TO TALK WITH ALL THOSE WHOM
HE HAD HOPED TO SEE IN ARGENTINA. VIDELA
WANTED HIM TO BE AWARE OF THE VIEWS OF A
WIDE RANGE OF ARGENTINES. HE HOPED AND
BELIEVED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS FAITHFULLY
INTERPRETING THE DESIRES OF THIS LARGE GROUP.

3. AS A BACKDROP TO CURRENT EVENTS, THE
PRESIDENT SKETCHED OUT RECENT ARGENTINE HISTORY--THE
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PROGRESSIVE DETERIORATION OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN THE 1969-75 PERIOD. BY THE END OF
1975 THERE WAS A POWER VACUUM AT THE CENTER OF
GOVERNMENT, BUT THERE WAS ALSO GREAT RELUCTANCE BY THE
ARMED FORCES TO INTERVENE IN VIEW OF THEIR PREVIOUS
EXPERIENCE. FINALLY, FACED WITH IMMINENT ECONOMIC COLLAPSE
OF THE COUNTRY WHICH WOULD HAVE THROWN THOUSANDS OF

WORKERS ON THE STREETS, PREY TO PREVIOUSLY UNSUCCESSFUL RECRUITING EFFORTS OF THE TERRORISTS, THE MILITARY HAD TO TAKE OVER WHEN THE POLITICAL PARTIES ADMITTED THEY WERE INCAPABLE OF RESOLVING THE SITUATION.

4. THE ARMED FORCES TAKEOVER WAS NOT JUST ANOTHER PALACE COUP. IT WAS THE ASSUMPTION OF POWER BY THE ARMED FORCES AS AN INSTITUTION. THEY DID SO RELUCTANTLY, AND THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS EXCLUSIVELY TO GET THE COUNTRY BACK ON THE TRACK. THEY HAD NO SECTARIAN OR PERSONAL AMBITIONS. THEY WERE COMMITTED TO RETURNING THE COUNTRY TO A THOROUGHLY REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY. THEY HAD MADE MUCH PROGRESS IN THE INTERVENING 16 MONTHS AND HOPED WITHIN A SHORT TIME TO MAKE MORE AND TO DEMONSTRATE SPECIFICALLY WHAT THIS GOVERNMENT WANTED TO ACHIEVE.

5. ASSTSEC TODMAN NOTED THE PROGRESS MADE, THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY, AND THE VIRTUAL ELIMINATION OF TERRORISM--GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS. HE STATED THAT THE BASIS OF THE TENSION BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS WAS THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION'S CONVICTION THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF A GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE--INDEED ITS SOLE PURPOSE--WAS HOW IT TREATED ITS OWN PEOPLE. WHERE IT APPEARED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS HAD BEEN VIOLATED, WE FELT IMPELLED TO SPEAK UP. WE HAD RECEIVED MANY REPORTS OF VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GOA'S CONFIDENTIAL

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CAMPAIGN AGAINST TERRORISM AND THE ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESS WERE STRONGLY MOTIVATED TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST ANY SUCH ABUSES. THE USG APPRECIATED THE CRUCIAL SITUATION WHICH THE GOA FELT ITSELF TO BE IN BUT COULD NOT BE SUPPORTIVE WHEN SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM VIOLATED THE RIGHTS OF THE INNOCENT. HE SAID THAT THE POLITICIANS HE SAW SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO DO WHAT IT DID TO COUNTER TERRORISM AND THEY GENERALLY SUPPORTED THE GOVERNMENT AND FELT THE SITUATION IS GREATLY IMPROVING. THEY CONTEND THAT THE IMPROVEMENT IS SUCH THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOW RELAX RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY.

6. PRESIDENT VIDELA SAID HE WOULD NOT BE PICTURED AS ONE WHO IS UNCONCERNED ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF HIS CITIZENS. HE FELT THAT MAN, AS GOD'S WORK, MUST BE RESPECTED AND VIEWED AS THE PURPOSE OF SOCIETY. HE ARGUED THE GREATEST GOOD FOR THE GREATER NUMBER AND CHALLENGED ASSTSEC TODMAN TO FIND AN ARGENTINE WHO DISAGREED WITH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 6281

HIM. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT PRETEND THAT THERE WERE
NO EXCESSES BY THE SECURITY FORCES IN THEIR FIGHT AND
PERHAPS EVEN SOME SCORE-SETTLING. HE SAID THAT WHAT WAS
MOST IMPORTANT WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S OBJECTIVE: PEACE UNDER
THE LAW AND A MONOPOLY OF FORCE UNDER GOVERNMENT
CONTROL. WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT SEVERAL RECENT DRAMATIC
DISAPPEARANCES, HE FREELY ADMITTED THAT AT THIS STAGE OF
THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM THE PROBLEM WAS OF ELEMENTS
OF THE SECURITY FORCES WHICH--FRANKLY--WERE BEYOND
THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL. THEY WERE WORKING HARD ON
THIS AND SUCCESS WAS INDISPENSABLE TO THE ACHIEVEMENT
OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OBJECTIVES, BUT SO FAR THEY HAD NOT
SOLVED THE PROBLEM.

7. ASSTSEC TODMAN SAID THE GOA CANNOT EXPECT INTER-
NATIONAL RESPECT AND SUPPORT UNTIL INTERNATIONALLY
RECOGNIZED RULES OF BEHAVIOR ARE OBSERVED. HE HOPED
WE COULD WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH THE GOA TO THIS END,
BUT VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD UNDERMINE ANY EFFORTS
TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. THE GOA
HAD MADE SUCH IMPRESSIVE STRIDES IN DEALING WITH
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TERRORISM THAT IT WOULD NOW BE SEEN AS A DEMONSTRATION
OF STRENGTH IF THE GOA TOOK MEASURES WITH PRISONERS AND

OTHER DETAINED PERSONS WHICH REFLECTED THAT STRENGTH. SUCH MEASURES MIGHT INCLUDE LISTS OF ALL PRISONERS NOW HELD, REINSTATEMENT OF THE RIGHT OF OPTION TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY OF REINSTITUTION OF THE RIGHT OF HABEAS CORPUS. THERE WERE SOME CASES IN WHICH INTERNATIONAL OPINION BECAME ESPECIALLY CONCERNED. HE CITED THE DETENTION OF JACOBO TIMERMAN WHICH HAD AWAKENED MUCH CONCERN BECAUSE IT INVOLVED PRESUMED ANTI-SEMITISM.

8. PRESIDENT VIDELA SAID HE THOROUGHLY REJECTED ANY IMPUTATION OF RACISM TO HIS GOVERNMENT AND SAID HE WAS THOROUGHLY DEDICATED TO PRINCIPLES WHICH DID NOT TOLERATE IT. TIMERMAN WAS NOT A VICTIM OF RACISM; HE IS SUSPECTED OF INVOLVEMENT OF ECONOMIC CRIMES WITH GRAIVER, WHO IN TURN WAS INVOLVED WITH TERRORISTS. TIMERMAN WILL BE DEALT WITH BY JUSTICE, BUT THIS DOES NOT INVOLVE ANTI-SEMITISM.

9. ASSTSEC TODMAN EXPLAINED PRESIDENT CARTER'S CONCERN ABOUT THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR ARMS AND ASKED IF PRESIDENT VIDELA MIGHT GIVE HIS MOST SERIOUS ATTENTION TO THE POSSIBILITY OF GOA REATIFICATION OF THE TREATY OF TLATELOLCO. SUCH ACTION WOULD BE AN EXAMPLE FOR THE HEMISPHERE.

10. PRESIDENT VIDELA SAID THAT THE GOA HAS ACCEPTED NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS, WHICH IN PRACTICAL TERMS ARE MORE EXTENSIVE CONTROLS THAN THOSE OF THE NFZ TREATY WHICH HAS POLITICAL LIABILITIES FOR THE GOA. HE SAID QUOTE WE WILL LOOK AT THE SITUATION, HOWEVER, AND SEE IF ACCEPTANCE MIGHT BE FEASIBLE. END QUOTE
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11. ASSTSEC TODMAN NOTED THAT THE GOA HAS EXPRESSED ITS SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN A VARIETY OF DOCUMENTS AND STATEMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT. HE HOPED THAT THE GOA MIGHT DO SO AGAIN BY SIGNING THE INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS, TOO, WOULD GIVE IMPETUS TO THE HEMISPHERIC CONCERN WITH THE ISSUE. PRESIDENT VIDELA SAID THAT RATIFICATION WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION AND HE WOULD SEE WHAT MIGHT BE DONE.

12. FOLLOWING AN EXCHANGE OF EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP THE 65-MINUTE CONVERSATION ENDED.
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